

To Russia

With Love (...and a lot of hardwork)

On June 1, Saints' Old Boy Tim Harvey '96 and Colin Angus set out on a unique journey—travelling from Vancouver to Moscow on human power alone. They plan to bike, row, and ski to the Russian capital, arriving in May 2005. Using local internet connections, Harvey (shown below) shares with *Dragon* readers the challenges of this unprecedented journey. He describes navigating the Five Finger Rapids in the Yukon Territories.

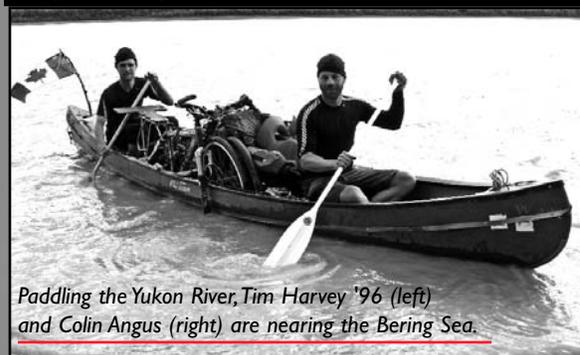
Can I really do this? I wondered as Five Finger Rapids roared on the horizon. I sat in the stern of Ripper, the derelict boat Colin Angus and I set afloat from Whitehorse, down the Yukon River as a live-aboard canoe. We were aiming to paddle it 1,600 km downriver to the Dalton Bridge where the Alaska Pipeline crosses the Yukon River. Threading a landscape plagued by wildfires, this would be a small section of a larger expedition: Vancouver to Moscow, by human power alone.

Human Power means shunning all use of fossil fuels on our 18,000 km journey. In fact, we won't even use a sail. These are rules we set ourselves in creating our ultimate challenge. This meant riding

bikes from Vancouver, our hometown, which we departed June 1, 2004. Our goal of cycling to the Dalton Bridge, near Fairbanks, Alaska, was nixed by road closures in the Yukon Territory due to forest fires, so we took to the liquid highway. Beyond the bridge begins our unprecedented row down the Lower Yukon River and then straight across the Bering Sea to Eastern Siberia. From there we ski and cycle through the coldest winter in the northern hemisphere.

But, for now I had a more immediate concern as Five Finger Rapids drew me in. A capsize now would cause the sort of grief routinely suffered during the

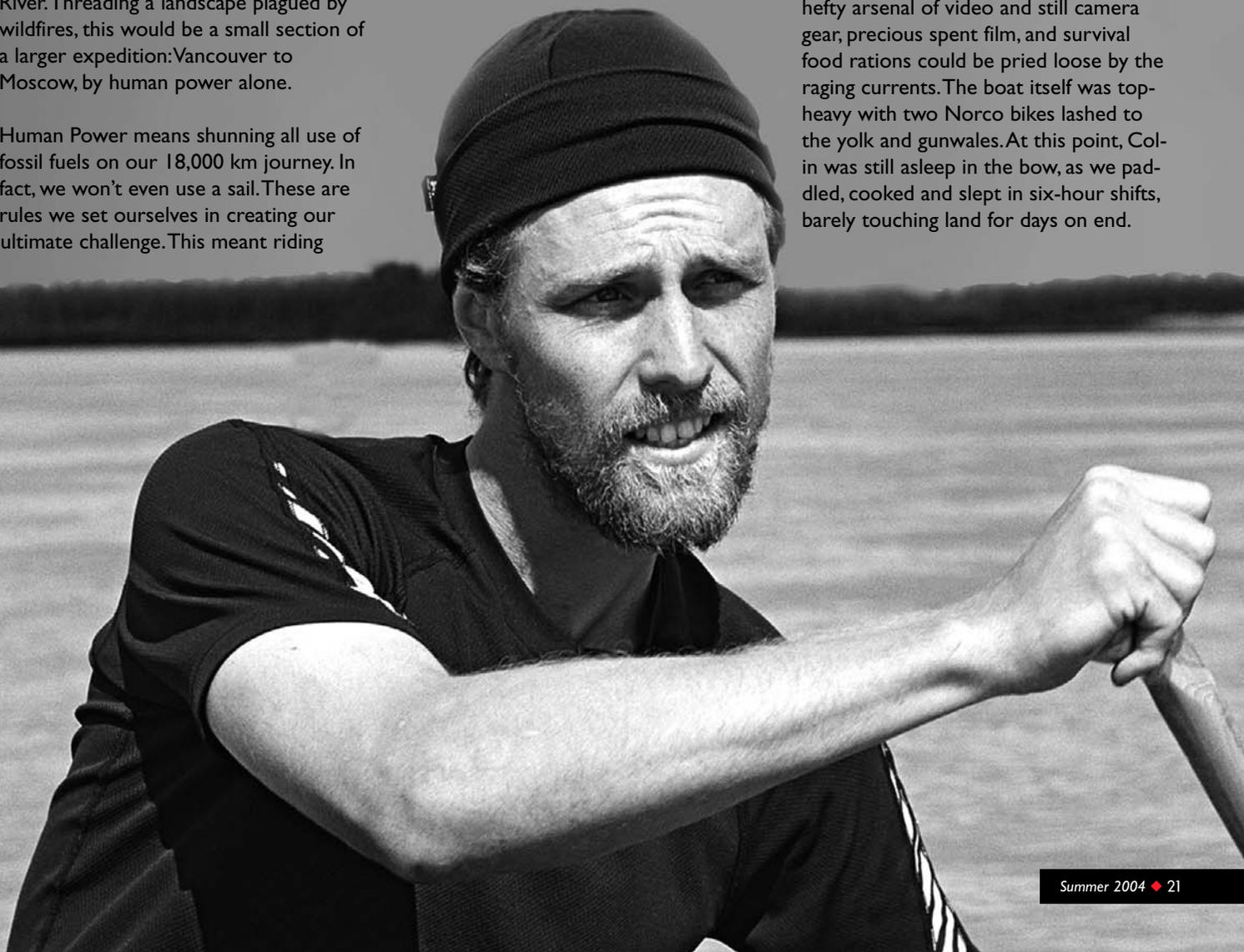
by Tim Harvey '96 www.vancouvertomoscow.com



Paddling the Yukon River, Tim Harvey '96 (left) and Colin Angus (right) are nearing the Bering Sea.

Klondike Gold Rush, in this very spot. Legions of adventurous young men staked their lives on dreams of gold and ferried small cargo boats down this stretch of the Yukon, filled with supplies for the Arctic winter. A capsize for them was disastrous, and meant swimming for gear in the icy currents.

The current quickened and turbulence echoed through a haze of wildfire smoke. Four house-sized pillars of rock took shape on the horizon, and I considered the worst. Our satellite phone, a hefty arsenal of video and still camera gear, precious spent film, and survival food rations could be pried loose by the raging currents. The boat itself was top-heavy with two Norco bikes lashed to the yolk and gunwales. At this point, Colin was still asleep in the bow, as we paddled, cooked and slept in six-hour shifts, barely touching land for days on end.





Travelling Light: Tim gives his legs a rest on the highway near Ashcroft, BC.

The basalt pillars loomed closer and whitewater thrashed below them. Five fingers of river sluiced through the channels of the canyon, flexing in chains of reared-up and crashing waves.

“Can I do this?” I asked myself again. “Yes, I can.” I chose the least horrendous-looking line through the canyon. “Yes, I can—but I could use some help!”

I shouted to Colin, who instantly awoke and seized his paddle. He knew the lore of Klondike miners drowned by these same churning waves. Steam-powered paddlewheelers fared better by using a steel cable and winch to navigate the rapids.

“I wouldn’t miss this for the world!” he shouted as we passed the point of no return.

Time seemed to slow as the rapids thundered near. We charged the first series of standing waves head-on. Ripper’s bow cut deep into the sloping waters then rose skyward like a breaching whale.

There was too much at stake to relax, but despite the tension, this was our element. This was our challenge. Ironically, this was bliss.

Colin and I both thrive on taking on a good challenge. At 32, Colin’s face has been weathered by years chasing dreams

through the Earth’s extremes. While still in high school Colin read a book that inspired him to sail offshore, which he did, for five years in the South Pacific beginning at age 19. A few years later he crossed South America by human power, hiking the Andes then rafting the Amazon River with two friends. In 2001, he set his sights on the world’s longest river unexplored from source to sea, rowing the Yenisey River through Mongolia and Siberia. His travels spawned a career in writing and film, and his book *Lost in Mongolia* became a Canadian bestseller.

I met Colin in 2000 while studying English and Journalism at the University of Victoria. Colin and I became friends as members of Vancouver Island’s small river and surf kayaking community. I derived a certain pleasure from watching his Yenisey exploits from afar, especially when international newswires carried the story of a starving Canadian paddler picked up by the Mongolian military, still clutching a bag of film he chased down following a capsized.



The Bering Charger: In Vancouver, Colin and Tim train on the rowboat they will use to cross the Bering Sea.

My interest in adventure flourished while I was a student in Victoria, but the seeds were planted long before I met Colin. A love for the wild was ingrained in me before the age of ten, during summer trips with my seafaring father and brothers by canoe or small craft in the outer coast of the Queen Charlottes and Vancouver Island. Capsizing in surf or being lost and down to our last litre of gas was a matter of course in those days.

It was at St. George’s School that I expanded my repertoire of outdoor skills.

In Grade 8, I had my first taste of rock climbing and hiking on glaciers during a retreat to Strathcona Park. I was also introduced to sea kayaking and took to the craft like a seal to water. Within hours of picking up a paddle, I had executed my first ever Eskimo roll. This unleashed a wave of confidence with paddle sports that became a guiding force in my life.

Little did I know where the path of the paddle would lead. Between semesters at UVic, I worked as a kayak guide among the Orcas and eagles of Northern Vancouver Island. When school was in, I lived by the beach and paddled with friends like housemate Jono Hungerford, a Saints’ alumnus, who passed away before completing his degree.

Jono’s life was constantly inspiring because he knew the value of living that so many take for granted. After his first brush with cancer, he lived with a passion to embrace every day and make the most of every moment, family, or friend. He was constantly venturing into the outdoors in search of adventure. He moved from the beaten path to see the world from inspiring perspectives.

This is exactly what the Yukon River offered as it pounded on Ripper, Colin, and me: a unique and inspiring perspective. In the heart of chaotic hydraulics, we felt the elation of dancing on waves.

A rogue current then hauled our boat toward a vortex that swirled like a black hole in the river. We dug with our paddles to keep away from its gaping mouth and then leaned into a sweeping turn to meet our final wave train. Waves curled over Ripper’s gunwales and pulled her near the point of capsize. Finally, we broke into safe waters, like a Java bean spared by the grinder.

This was meant to be the easy part of our journey, but just downriver lies the Bering Sea. Nobody has ever rowed across it. What qualifies two intrepid Vancouverites to take this on? We’re fuelled by the belief that yes, we can. **D**